

# Public Comment by Adeline Wilcox

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Remarks Michael Thieme made yesterday further convince me that the 2020 Census is a failed census. One of his slides told us:

Processing software was miscalculating the age of respondents if those respondents did not include the month and day of their birthday in their response.

Based on my experience at the U.S. Census Bureau, only sloppy requirements development, coding and management could bring this miscalculation about.

In the late 1990s, I was a SAS® developer. I worked on the American Community Survey (ACS) Age Edit. Nearly 3,000 lines of spaghetti code modified from the 1990 Census Age Edit. I tested the ACS Age Edit over and over. Needless to say, debugging was hard work.

In the late 1990s, all supervisory programmers working on the ACS had 1990 Census experience. Unlike Michael Thieme, they never offered explanations such as "for some reason". They spent days debugging code until they understood why it did not produce the required results. ACS supervisors didn't whine about the difficulty of anticipating response values; they developed code which handled unexpected values. No later than 1998, Dalzell, chief 1990 Census programmer, told me everything happens in the decennial census. I understood that to mean unexpected combinations of response values arise.

In a recent blog<sup>1</sup> Thieme wrote

Having worked on a number of decennial censuses, the career processing staff at the Census Bureau understand that the reality for any large, complex data collection is that coding is never able to anticipate every data situation, no matter how well we test it.

Thieme's statement presents a picture of poorly planned design and testing. In 2016, the StEPS II proof of concept failure signaled poor planning, design, management and unreadiness for response data processing.

The Census Bureau has scheduled the first 2020 ACS data release for September 23, 2021, ahead of the official "user-friendly" 2020 Census P.L. 94-171 data release.

2020 ACS data were also collected during the pandemic. At this late date, the pandemic doesn't explain decennial data processing delays. The ACS has working systems; decennial staff evidently failed to thoroughly test theirs.

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<sup>1</sup> *Finding Anomalies Illustrates 2020 Census Quality Checks Are Working* Michael Thieme. March 09, 2021. Web.